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Environment Department to Beef Up WIPP Oversight; Four New NMED Employees to Start Monday in Carlsbad

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department's (NMED) Department of Energy Oversight Bureau (DOE OB) will formally reopen its Carlsbad operations on Monday, November 8. NMED's DOE OB will restart environmental monitoring of DOE's Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) with four employees. NMED expects to add an additional three employees to this staff in the coming months.

The four employees due to start Monday in Carlsbad include two veterans of the recently closed Environmental Evaluation Group (EEG), one scientist with experience in NMED's oversight of Los Alamos National Laboratory, and one office administrator. These workers will split their time between NMED's existing Field Office at 406 North Guadalupe Street in Carlsbad and office space at the WIPP site.

"These personnel could not have started at a better time," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "The problems WIPP have been experiencing lately with the disposal of unapproved waste highlights the need for improved oversight of DOE's operations in Carlsbad."

NMED's new Carlsbad personnel's qualifications include one EEG alum with a background in engineering and industrial safety, another veteran of EEG with strong experience in environmental sampling, and a health physicist with a background in environmental monitoring and human health impacts.

The three additional positions include two environmental scientists and an office manager.

NMED's DOE OB currently operates at Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories. At these sites, DOE OB personnel engage in non-regulatory oversight and scientific studies of environmental and worker safety issues. At Los Alamos, work has included groundbreaking studies of contaminants like perchlorate, PCBs and plutonium runoff since the Cerro Grande fire. The DOE OB is funded through an Agreement in Principal (AIP) with DOE. Due to federal funding cuts, NMED's WIPP office has been closed since 1996.

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“Having these oversight personnel on the ground in Carlsbad is going to benefit both NMED and the citizens of New Mexico,” said Secretary Curry. “Local oversight will give New Mexicans better environmental protections. These new NMED employees will do vital work, looking over WIPP’s shoulder and making sure that this operation is run safely and properly.”

With the addition of these oversight personnel, the regulatory role of NMED’s Hazardous Waste Bureau in permitting and enforcement issues at WIPP will remain unchanged.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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